

VZCZCXRO5229
PP RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHCI #0252/01 2481259
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 041259Z SEP 08
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2123
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2593

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000252

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL (MORALES)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: ORISSA: REPORTS FROM THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

REF: A. KOLKATA 247
[1](#)B. KOLKATA 245
[1](#)C. KOLKATA 239
[1](#)D. KOLKATA 238
[1](#)E. KOLKATA 002

KOLKATA 00000252 001.2 OF 002

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Two weeks after communal violence targeting Christians erupted in the Kandhamal district in the State of Orissa, increasing numbers of victims are being housed in government camps. Three new camps opened this week, bringing the total to ten camps housing over 12,000 people. This number reflects a threefold increase from last week. People in the camps report that they feel secure but fear returning to their communities without reassurances for their safety, freedom of religion, and compensation to rebuild their lives. No new attacks have been reported. End Summary.

Reports From Displaced Persons Camps

[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 3, Poloff spoke to Major Jirimio Digall of the Salvation Army whose family has strong ties to Tiangia, the Orissa village in which violence against Christian started on August 24. Digall told Poloff that a relative had been visiting the village when the violence erupted. He is now living in a government camp in Raikia after spending three days hiding in the forest. Poloff spoke to Digall's relative by cell phone and he reported that while he feels secure in the Raikia camp, which accommodates 13,000 people, he is afraid of returning to his village due to reports of continued violence and forced conversions. He told Poloff that others at the camp are also afraid to return home. He explained that the villages prefer to remain in the government-administered camp, where they can get food and medical care.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Poloff also spoke with another victim, Gopal Chandra Naik, at a camp located at G. Udyagiri. According to Naik, the camp houses 6,000 Christian tribal people from 20 small villages in Richya, Tikkabali and Gudaysgiri. Naik complained that the camp does not have adequate food and water supplies, but reported that the people generally feel safe. Naik told Poloff that the police presence at the camp was increased from 20 to 200 officers on the eve of Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil's visit.

Christian Leadership Perspective

[1](#)4. (SBU) On September 3, Embassy Poloff met with Rev. Dr. Babu Joseph of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) in Delhi to discuss the organization's perspective on the situation and its plan of action. Fr. Joseph explained that the residents of these Orissa districts are almost evenly divided between two groups: tribals and the lowest castes, with Christian converts from both groups. He contends that traditionally, the tribals have practiced an animistic religion and parties such as the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) are "Hindu-izing" the tribal people for political gain. Fr. Joseph argued that Christian communities educate and employ many people in the districts, causing resentment by ruling Hindu nationalist parties that would prefer to keep certain sectors of society impoverished as sources of cheap labor that can be easily controlled. He rejected claims of forced conversion to Christianity, arguing that Hindus are forcing Christians to convert (or reconvert) to Hinduism.

¶5. (SBU) Fr. Joseph believes the attacks were premeditated since these were not the first attack against Christians and the groups appeared to be well-mobilized,. He noted that the attackers used home-made bombs, which require preparation time, and came armed with lists of Christian residences. He argued that the organizers were waiting for the prefect moment to attack, which was provided by the murder of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati.

¶6. (SBU) Fr. Joseph explained that CBCI filed a petition with the Supreme Court because they see it as the only effective venue open to the organization. He noted that the Supreme Court had assisted CBCI in the aftermath of the similar attacks against Christians during the 2007 holiday season. CBCI's petition calls on the national government to launch a Central Bureau of Intelligence investigation, ensure the safety of Christian communities, and compensate the victims. On September 3, the Supreme Court demanded that the Orissa state government report the steps taken to curb the violence by the following day. Fr. Joseph said that the CBCI will await the Orissa state government's report and the court's verdict, but it will not stop there. CBCI plans to intensify civil protests and raise international awareness to pressure the GOI. If it fails to take action, Fr. Joseph declared that CBCI will take the situation to the United Nations, arguing that the government's inactivity violates fundamental human rights, especially the rights of indigenous people to choose their religion.

KOLKATA 00000252 002.2 OF 002

Comment

¶7. (SBU) Even if the situation in Orissa stabilizes, the CBCI and other Christian groups will likely continue to pressure the state and national authorities to more effectively protect Christians in Orissa. They plan to hold public demonstrations -- one planned is in Kolkata this weekend -- in support of freedom of religion. While observers are anxious to see Orissa's response to the Supreme Court, the report is unlikely to include a plan of action for returning displaced persons to their villages and building trust between the Hindu and Christian communities. The Centre will probably limit its intervention to additional police forces to restore law and order. The Orissa government has its hands full as it has to show progress in its investigation of the murder of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, explain their actions to the Supreme Court and the Centre, and provide services to a growing number of displaced persons in the camps. End Comment.
PAYNE